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Melbourne to decide on water, sewer rate hike

Proposed increase wouldn't start until October 2013

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Melbourne is considering hiking its water rates beginning October 2013. / FLORIDA TODAY file

Written by
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FLORIDA TODAY

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Melbourne is weighing a new round of water and sewer rate increases that wouldn't hit customers' bills until October 2013.

The average residential customer would see their combined bill go up by about \$3 per month in the first year after the proposed rate increases take effect, then another \$3.50 to \$3.80 per month for the following three years.

The increase is needed to maintain the system, but city council wanted to give customers a break from higher bills. The water and sewer rates last went up in October.

"We have a mature system and there's a lot of repair and maintenance mostly on the wastewater end," Finance Director Michele Ennis said. "They indicated they don't want to have an increase to the utility customer for the first year."

Melbourne City Council will have a final vote on the proposed rates today.

City leaders say the increase is needed to pay for an estimated \$93 million in maintenance and upgrades during the next six years to Melbourne's water system, which serves residents within the city plus West Melbourne and beachside communities.

Melbourne will pay for that construction by issuing bonds, but it needs the higher rates in place to show it will have the revenue to pay off that debt, Ennis said.

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Across the system, revenues would go up 7 percent starting in October 2013.

But the proposed rate change would impact each customer differently based on the amount of water they use and the size of the waterline serving their home or business.

The next three fiscal years will have flat 5.5 percent increases.

Also under consideration are:

- Higher impact fees charges levied on new development to tap into the system. The proposed water impact fee would go from \$1,116 for a single family home to \$1,540, while sewer would increase from \$1,583 to \$2,210.

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The new impact fees wouldn't start until October 2013.

- Higher security deposits for new water and sewer customers.

The combined rate would go from \$120 to \$150. Security deposits haven't changed since 1991, Ennis said.

The new deposits, which would start immediately, won't impact existing customers, who see their deposit returned after successfully paying their bills for a year.

The deposits are charged to prevent the city from losing revenue from customers who move out of homes without paying their final bill, Ennis said. About 700 to 800 people move in to and out of Melbourne homes each month, she said.

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